

Illinois Department on Aging
Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act
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Interdependence of Generations

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It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand the impact of older people reading with young students or kids helping frail elders with chores, or communities involving homebound in a telephone tree or after-school visiting. Unfortunately, there is no consistent path to on going involvement for younger and older generations.

As a result, we lose the benefits from individuals of all ages that could result in a better quality of life. Too often the disabled, homebound, and frail are ignored. Likewise, youngsters who have time on their hands are not considered community resources. We permeate the stereotype that older and younger generations are dependent, lacking in value, and only capable of receiving services.

Generations need to be more connected so they can find little ways to help each other. We must emphasize the value of individuals by tapping their skills from the earliest years until the last moments of life, thus enlisting untold talents to address the challenges of education and the community.

Take the example of Mary Simon, a Carbondale resident, who will soon celebrate her 90th birthday. She has organized a group of retirees in a campaign called Find Five. She is asking her friends, colleagues, and community leaders to recruit 5 retirees to read with students as part of a statewide Retiree Volunteer Program.

In a creative view of the aging world, retirees who are helping in the schools today could be the elders who are receiving help from youngsters in the future. The connectedness of education and retirement is clearly a direction with extraordinary potential.

Recommendations on the Interdependence of Generations

Recommendation One: We need to engage older and younger generations jointly as participants, planners, and organizers of volunteer systems that can meet the needs of all generations.

Recommendation Two: We need to do a better job of publicizing the successes of

connecting the generations and describe “what’s in it for me” for communities, business, the aging network, and education.

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Recommendation Three: “One of the most crucial responses to the aging challenge is to reintegrate older citizens into the productive mainstream of society. We need to redefine retirement” Richard Jackson, Global Aging Initiative, Center for International and Strategic Studies.

Recommendation Four: Higher education must consider the aging world and the knowledge essential to a workforce with a greater representation of older clients. All fields in higher education must integrate aging education into their courses, particularly disciplines related to retirees and older generations.